

This morning I want to start by asking you a couple of questions. (ask for hands)

How many of you believe that Jesus rose from the dead?

How many believe that's the best news in the world?

How many believe it should be shared with everyone?

How many believe it would make an eternal difference to those who hear it?

I'll come back to those questions...before I do that, let me read you something...

READ TEXT (with explanations)

Often when I read this Book, the Book of Acts, I feel a mixture of excitement and discouragement...

EXCITEMENT at the marvelous, powerful things that happened in the early days of the church as they spread the Word of God in the face of hatred and violent persecution...

followed by

DISCOURAGEMENT that I so rarely see such things in the church today.

What IS it that has changed?

The same GOD sits on the throne.

We have the same FAITH – a minute ago you agreed you have it!

We have the same MESSAGE to preach -- Jesus Christ crucified and risen... that would make the same eternal difference in those who hear it.

We are people made of the same FLESH and BLOOD, facing the same kinds of OPPOSITION.

What's missing?

Perhaps I can illustrate what I think is missing by telling you a true story of something that happened to me when we lived in Vancouver.

It was early morning.

I hurried out of the house and climbed into my car, which sat, as always, in the driveway.

I had a meeting to attend, and not much time to get there.

But when I turned the key in the ignition, nothing happened!

“What’s wrong?” I wondered.

“It’s the same car I drove home last night.

I’m the same driver, using the same set of keys.

It ran fine last night...why not this morning?

When I climbed out and opened the hood, I found the answer:
someone had stolen my battery!

I wonder if something similar has happened to the CHURCH,
for it is obvious to me that SOMETHING is missing!

According to the late pastor James Kennedy of Coral Ridge, Florida,
95% of Christians in USA have never led a single person to faith in Jesus Christ.

What’s even worse, he says, is that most of us don’t even try!

What’s missing?

Look again at the verses I read in Acts 4, and the answer will jump out at you.
It was that quality which impressed the temple authorities who arrested
Peter and John...

**and when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that
they were uneducated, common men, they wondered!**

The church today, and that includes most of us who say we believe in Jesus Christ, lacks
that BOLDNESS that enabled Peter and John to speak out with courage.

So we sit in our big churches like so many cars without batteries...
powerless...idling away the time
in a world of people destined for hell.

If we pray at all about the opposition that faces us,
our prayer is a prayer for protection... for deliverance...
for our SAFETY till the storm passes.

Satan has stolen our BOLDNESS...and replaced it with FEAR.

We hear exhortations to go and spread the Gospel.
And like the mice in Aesop's fable who discussed bellring the cat,
we all agree it needs to be done....
BUT WE OURSELVES WILL NOT DO IT!

Do you sense it happening inside YOU?

Suppose that I challenged you personally to tell someone about Jesus this week,
what sort of fears would it stir up?

I can tell you MINE – for I meet those fears every time I step up to the door
of an unfamiliar home and knock...

“I'll look like a fool” “I'll stumble over my words”
“Maybe they'll get angry at me”

Have you said such things to yourself?

On the heels of our fears come the rationalizations:
“If I LIVE my faith, maybe I won't have to SAY anything.”
“Besides, most of my acquaintances are probably believers already”

And so it is that in many of us, Satan wins the battle without having to fire a shot!

Is it any wonder that Christianity is not growing in this country...
and that 2/3 of the congregations in our LC-MS brought almost no one to Christ
in the past year?

It doesn't have to be that way!

We need not resign ourselves to RETREAT AND DEFEAT –
especially not if we are willing to learn a lesson from those early Christians.

How did THEY do it?

What was the secret of their astounding BOLDNESS?
For surely they were ordinary people like us.
They weren't all heroes and “supermen”!
How did they DO what we find so HARD TO DO?

As I read this text, I see two things...

FIRST, THEY HAD THEIR PRIORITIES STRAIGHT.

They saw as their chief task – their most important assignment – the
SPEAKING OF GOD’S WORD.

You’d think that would be obvious to us, wouldn’t you?

The chief job of the Army is to Fight.

The chief job of the Seattle Seahawks Team is to play football.

It’s OK if Quarterback Matt Hasselbeck
wants to make some soup commercials on the side,
but he’d better not forget that his first priority is playing FOOTBALL!

The early Christians knew what their chief JOB was.
It says here they “spoke the Word”...

Not just the Apostles did that. ALL of them did!

Let’s get personal.

How about Trinity Lutheran Church of Oregon City, Oregon?

Do WE know what our first priority is?

Does everything in the life of our church revolve around the essential task
of SPEAKING THE WORD OF GOD to each other and those outside?

Must we not admit that we have spent a lot of time and effort on things that are
fun, but have little to do with SHARING the Word of God?

My JOB as PASTOR
is to remind us regularly
that God has brought us together to MAKE DISCIPLES!
to SPEAK GOD’S WORD to others!

Perhaps you’ll say, “I agree it’s important, but I’m still afraid.”

You are not alone!

I’m convinced that the early Christians were just as HUMAN – and just as
FRIGHTENED – as we are!

But they knew what to DO about it.

That brings me to the SECOND thing to see in this text.
They PRAYED FOR BOLDNESS:

And Now, Lord, look upon their threats, and grant your servants to speak your Word with all BOLDNESS.

We're accustomed to thinking that BOLDNESS is a natural gift, that some are born "mouthy", and others born "shy and quiet."

But that's not what "BOLDNESS" means.

The Greek word for boldness literally means to "say everything" on one's mind without holding back.

It's not so much a description of an attitude (COURAGE) as an ACTION (to SPEAK FREELY what one knows)

Remember Peter?

He was, you recall, one of those naturally brash, mouthy people.
Until that night in the high priest's courtyard...

There he would NOT say what He knew about Jesus. He denied the Lord.

So how is it that Peter can be found in the pages of the Book of Acts doing the very thing he would not do in the courtyard?

He did not learn it at the seminary!
He hadn't read a book entitled YOU TOO CAN BE BOLD.

he had received BOLDNESS as a GIFT when God poured out the Holy Spirit.

Boldness is a GIFT – and God can give it to anyone,
even a shy, fearful, unskilled public speaker like most of us are...

So I say to you: PRAY FOR BOLDNESS!

One day's worth of Boldness.
Boldness enough to share Jesus with JUST ONE PERSON.

And when you have done it, ask for it again the next day.

Those people did. And God heard their prayer:

When they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and spoke the Word of God with BOLDNESS!

The results were fantastic!

Within 31 years of the resurrection of Jesus
the Gospel had leap-frogged 1500 miles from Jerusalem to Rome
and planted a church of several thousand believers there.

“It was an astonishing explosion.” writes historian Paul Maier, **“For the Christian message to travel so far, so fast was an event absolutely unparalleled in the ancient world.”**

Only the power of God, giving BOLDNESS to many hundreds of believers, could have worked such a miracle.

But that should not surprise us, should it?

For that same power was what raised Jesus from the dead.

And that same power washes away our sins and brings us to life with Him.

God has already done that in you, hasn't He?

Is anything too hard for Him?

He stands ready to give it, if you will simply ASK FOR IT.

Is there anything the world needs more today?

Dr. R. A. Torrey tells of an incident in his life

that occurred when he was eating dinner at a restaurant in Brighton, England.

During dinner, one of Dr. Torrey's companions, a young evangelist, noted that their waiter wore a troubled look.

Into his heart rushed the conviction that he ought to say something to that waiter. But immediately his fears protested – not here in a restaurant! Not in front of all these other diners.

The meal was ended. The bill was paid. The group left the restaurant. But that young evangelist's heart was still troubled, so he turned back, and went in to find the owner.

“Where is the waiter who served us tonight?” (and he shared the name) “I feel I must speak with him.”

With a shaking voice the manager stared at him. “I am sorry,” he said, “but that will not be possible. Only a moment ago, we discovered him in a back room. He had shot himself in the head.”

If only he had spoken sooner! If only he had been BOLD enough!

The world is dying without Jesus Christ.
But you and I know Him!

We know His love, His forgiveness, His peace.
We have the Word that brings LIFE to troubled hearts.

Let us ask God forgiveness for our fears and excuses and missed opportunities.

Let us take a step today, and PRAY... not that God keep us sheltered and safe,
not that enemies will leave the church alone... NO!
Let us pray FOR BOLDNESS!

Let us take a further step this week and initiate a conversation. With a waiter, a store clerk, an acquaintance.

In this Friendship Month and beyond,
let us invite someone to come to God’s House if they will...
and even if they will NOT, let us say with joy what we KNOW to be true.

Jesus lives! Jesus loves them, and us.

Please bow and pray with me now...